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UNITED NATIONS INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM
ON TRADE EFFICIENCY
Columbus, Ohio, 17 October 1994

REPORT OF THE PREPARATORY COMMITTEE FOR THE UNITED NATIONS INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON TRADE EFFICIENCY

on its session held at the Palais des Nations,
Geneva, from 27 June to 1 July 1994

CONTENTS

Chapter		Paragraphs
	Introduction	1 - 4
I.	Consideration of guidelines on key sectors for trade efficiency: customs, transport, banking and insurance, business information for trade, business practices, and telecommunications (agenda item 4)	5 - 8
II.	Consideration of the draft Columbus Ministerial Declaration on Trade Efficiency (agenda item 5) . . .	9 - 12
III.	Matters relating to the organization of the United Nations International Symposium on Trade Efficiency (agenda item 6)	13 - 37
IV.	Organizational matters	38 - 43

Annexes

I.	Decision adopted by the Preparatory Committee on preparations for the United Nations International Symposium on Trade Efficiency	
II.	Attendance	

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INTRODUCTION

1. At its third session, held from 2 to 11 May 1994, the Ad Hoc Working Group on Trade Efficiency recommended to the Trade and Development Board that a preparatory committee be established in order to prepare for the United Nations International Symposium on Trade Efficiency, to be held in Columbus, Ohio, from 17 to 21 October 1994. At the resumed second part of its fortieth session, on 27 May 1994, the Trade and Development Board endorsed the recommendation of the Ad Hoc Working Group.

2. Accordingly, the Preparatory Committee for the United Nations International Symposium on Trade Efficiency met at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, from 27 June to 1 July 1994.

3. In the course of its session, the Preparatory Committee held 2 formal plenary meetings and 10 informal meetings.

Introductory statement

4. The Head of the Special Programme on Trade Efficiency, speaking on behalf of the Officer-in-Charge of UNCTAD, said that the Symposium was a crucial event that would enable ministers to give new impetus to the work done by UNCTAD. It would provide the basis for a new era in international trade, in which the smallest and the poorest would become parties to modern international trade, and efficiency would be the catalyst of equality. The Symposium would provide an unprecedented opportunity for trade ministers to tackle areas where immediate results were possible, and it was the subject of growing enthusiasm.

Chapter I

CONSIDERATION OF GUIDELINES ON KEY SECTORS FOR TRADE EFFICIENCY: CUSTOMS, TRANSPORT, BANKING AND INSURANCE, BUSINESS INFORMATION FOR TRADE, BUSINESS PRACTICES, AND TELECOMMUNICATIONS

(Agenda item 4)

5. For its consideration of this item, the Preparatory Committee had before it the following documentation:

"Draft recommendations for Governments" (TD/B/40(2)/L.6, annex IV);

"Draft recommendations not considered by the Ad Hoc Working Group on Trade Efficiency" (TD/SYMP.TE/PC/2).

6. At its 1st plenary meeting, on 27 June 1994, the Preparatory Committee decided to pursue its consideration of agenda item 4 in informal meetings.

7. At its closing plenary meeting, on 1 July 1994, the Preparatory Committee approved "Draft recommendations and guidelines for trade efficiency" (TD/SYMP.TE/PC/L.4) for transmission to the Meeting of Senior Officials and subsequent consideration by Ministers and other representatives at the International Symposium. (The draft recommendations and guidelines were subsequently issued in document TD/SYMP.TE/R.2)

8. The Preparatory Committee also adopted a decision on "Preparations for the United Nations International Symposium on Trade Efficiency" relating in part to agenda item 4 (for the text of the decision, see annex I).

Chapter II

CONSIDERATION OF THE DRAFT COLUMBUS MINISTERIAL DECLARATION ON TRADE EFFICIENCY

(Agenda item 5)

9. For its consideration of this item, the Preparatory Committee had before it the following documentation:

"Draft Columbus ministerial declaration on trade efficiency" (TD/B/40(2)/L.6, annex V).

10. At its 1st plenary meeting, on 27 June 1994, the Preparatory Committee decided to pursue its consideration of item 5 in informal meetings.

11. At its closing plenary meeting, on 1 July 1994, the Preparatory Committee approved the "Draft Columbus Ministerial Declaration on Trade Efficiency" (TD/SYMP.TE/PC/L.3), to be transmitted for finalization at the Meeting of Senior Officials with a view to its adoption by Ministers and other representatives at the International Symposium. (The Draft Declaration was subsequently issued in document TD/SYMP.TE/R.1.)

12. The Preparatory Committee also adopted a decision on "Preparations for the United Nations International Symposium on Trade Efficiency" relating in part to agenda item 5 (for the text of the decision, see annex I).

Chapter III

MATTERS RELATING TO THE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON TRADE EFFICIENCY

(Agenda item 6)

13. The representative of the UNCTAD secretariat said that, at the invitation of the authorities of the host country, a group of UNCTAD staff had visited Columbus, Ohio, the week before, to participate in a round-table meeting bringing together all the various participants involved in the organization of the Symposium and the other associated events, i.e. the Convention of Chief Executive Officers, the Mayors' Conference, and a TECHTRADE Show. While a number of issues remained to be finalized, the outcome of the discussions at the meeting had been most constructive, and it was clear that progress had been made with regard to the preparations for the Symposium.

14. It was known already that the Convention Centre in Columbus offered all the necessary logistical facilities to support this complex event, and the meeting had provided an opportunity to fine-tune the specific arrangements.

15. Regarding the host country agreement, including its associated financial provisions, some delay had been experienced. However, in view of recent discussions held in New York on the format of the agreement, it was now hoped to be able to sign the agreement in the next few weeks in order to ensure that arrangements for the Symposium were put in place in a timely manner.

16. The question of ensuring the central role of the United Nations Symposium in the context of all four events was a matter of paramount importance, both to the host Government and the UNCTAD secretariat. In particular, it should be clear that corporate sponsorship of the parallel events did not appear to extend to the United Nations International Symposium of Trade Efficiency. To this end, close consultations were continuing between UNCTAD and the host authorities in order to ensure compatibility with United Nations practices.

17. As regards provision of assistance for the participation of developing countries thanks to the generous offer of a $300,000 grant by the host authorities, it had been agreed that UNCTAD, on the basis of a list provided by the host country, would provide travel and daily subsistence allowance to participants from developing countries.

18. Lastly, the meeting in Columbus had provided an opportunity to clarify to those concerned the many and varied implications involved in the hosting of such an international event. The enthusiasm of the people and the authorities of the city of Columbus was especially engaging and a most positive augury for the success of this most important event.

19. The Head of the Special Programme on Trade Efficiency, responding to a question from the United Kingdom, said that a detailed briefing on the proceedings of the Symposium would be provided to delegations in the very near future.

20. The Chairperson, responding to a question from China, said that information on the logistics and local arrangements for the Symposium would be dispatched to delegations through the UNCTAD secretariat in the coming days.

21. The representative of Nepal, referring to the financial assistance being provided by the host country for participation at the Symposium, said that the normal practice under such circumstances was for priority to be given to LDCs. It was not clear whether this practice was going to be followed in the case of the Symposium.

22. The representative of the United States of America said that the countries listed by the host country to receive assistance to attend the Symposium were those identified by the World Bank in the World Development Report as having the lowest per capita income. The countries in question did not, however, correspond exactly to the list of LDCs as defined by the United Nations, since some of those LDCs did not have diplomatic relations with the host country and could not, therefore, receive assistance from USAID, which was the donor of the funds in question.

23. The Chairperson said that her Government, in making financial support available, had stated that the funds would be used to help developing countries attend the Symposium. It had provided a list of recipient countries in response to a request from the UNCTAD secretariat, and expenses had been calculated on the basis of United Nations practices.

24. The representative of Kenya thanked the United States Government for the financial assistance it was providing in connection with the Symposium. The success of the Symposium would depend on the broadest possible participation, and although the LDCs were the most in need of assistance in that connection, other developing countries were in a very difficult financial situation and would not be able to participate in the Symposium as a result. It was therefore hoped that the donor community, including the United States, could look at the issue anew and try to provide additional assistance for participation.

25. The Chairperson said that the UNCTAD secretariat had waived its overheads on the funds being provided by the United States Government, thus making more money available for countries, and it was also trying to identify additional sources of funding.

26. The representative of Cuba said that his country was extremely interested in the Symposium and in that connection had received assurances from the Officer-in-Charge of UNCTAD that it would receive an invitation to attend. However, in view of the comments made by the representative of the host country concerning countries that did not have diplomatic relations with that country, he wished to know whether the designated representative of his country would receive a visa to attend the Symposium.

27. The representative of the United States of America said that his comments in connection with financial assistance had no bearing on the question of visas. Designated country representatives and secretariat staff would receive visas to attend the Symposium, in accordance with the standard

practice for international meetings hosted by his Government. The exact privileges and immunities of participants in the Symposium would be defined in the host country agreement, which had not yet been finalized, but he was confident that all delegations would be able to attend the Symposium without undue difficulty.

28. The Chairperson said that all accredited representatives would be free to attend the Symposium, which was a United Nations meeting and for which all the corresponding rights and privileges would be guaranteed.

29. The representative of Finland said his delegation welcomed the fact that the principle of the impartiality of Trade Points, the equal treatment of all parties and the avoidance of monopoly positions was unanimously accepted. His delegation attached importance to the fact that Trade Points must assist traders without participating directly in transactions. His delegation was delighted that this issue could be further discussed at a meeting of Trade Point directors in Geneva before the Symposium, and he suggested that this meeting be provided with full interpretation services.

30. The representative of China welcomed the idea of a Trade Point directors' meeting but suggested that the meeting should be held in Columbus just before the Senior Officials' meeting instead of in Geneva because of resource problems for some developing countries.

31. The representative of Switzerland expressed support for the statement of Finland. His authorities were considering the possibility of providing funding for the meeting.

32. The Chairperson said that the Trade Point directors represented an important part of the preparatory process for the Symposium, and it would be embarrassing if the Trade Point Network could not be launched at the Symposium because the Trade Point directors had not been able to complete their preparations.

33. The Preparatory Committee decided to recommend that the convening of a meeting of Trade Point directors in Geneva during the period 5-7 September should be discussed at the next consultations of the Officer-in-Charge of UNCTAD.

34. The Preparatory Committee also adopted a decision on "Preparations for the United Nations International Symposium on Trade Efficiency" (for the text of the decision, see annex I).

Closing statements

35. The representative of the United Republic of Tanzania said that his delegation was satisfied with the outcome of the meeting. The documentation prepared for the Symposium reflected the interests of LDCs. He thanked the United States for the financial assistance it was providing to help ministers and some mayors from LDCs to attend the Symposium. Once the Symposium had taken place, he expected that measures would be taken to implement the recommendations on trade efficiency as they affected LDCs.

36. The spokesman for the European Union (Germany) said that the results of the Preparatory Committee's work were excellent. The European Union hoped that the European Commission would be referred to in the Ministerial Declaration as a participant, since the Commission represented all the members of the Union in international trade matters.

37. The Chairperson said that those who had questioned the continued existence of UNCTAD at Cartagena had now been given their answer in the shape of the draft documents prepared for the Symposium. She commended delegations for their two years of innovative and spectacular work.

Chapter IV

ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS

A. Opening of the session

38. The session of the Preparatory Committee was opened on 27 June 1994 by Mrs. E. Shelton (United States of America), Chairperson of the Ad Hoc Working Group on Trade Efficiency.

B. Election of officers

(Agenda item 1)

39. At its 1st plenary meeting, on 27 June 1994, in accordance with the recommendation of the Ad Hoc Working Group on Trade Efficiency on 11 May 1994, as endorsed by the Trade and Development Board on 27 May 1994, the Preparatory Committee decided that the Bureau of the Ad Hoc Working Group should serve as the Bureau of the Preparatory Committee.

40. The Bureau of the Preparatory Committee was thus as follows:

Chairperson:	Mrs. E. Shelton	(United States of America)
Vice-Chairmen:	Mr. A.-R. Al Sohaibani	(Saudi Arabia)
	Mr. E. Dreyfous	(France)
	Mr. M. Mangachi	(United Republic of Tanzania)
	Mr. J. Perez Gabilondo	(Argentina)
	Mr. Y. Afanassiev	(Russian Federation)
Rapporteur:	Mr. A. Brahime	(Morocco)

C. Adoption of the rules of procedure

(Agenda item 2)

41. At its 1st plenary meeting, on 27 June 1994, the Preparatory Committee decided that its rules of procedure should be, *mutatis mutandis*, those of the Trade and Development Board.

D. Adoption of the agenda and organization of work

(Agenda item 3)

42. At its 1st plenary meeting, on 27 June 1994, the Preparatory Committee adopted its provisional agenda (TD/SYMP.TE/PC/1), as follows:

1. Election of officers
2. Adoption of the rules of procedure
3. Adoption of the agenda and organization of work

4. Consideration of guidelines on key sectors for trade efficiency: customs, transport, banking and insurance, business information for trade, business practices, and telecommunications

5. Consideration of the draft Columbus Ministerial Declaration on Trade Efficiency

6. Matters relating to the organization of the United Nations International Symposium on Trade Efficiency

7. Other business

8. Adoption of the report of the Preparatory Committee to the United Nations International Symposium on Trade Efficiency.

E. Adoption of the report of the Preparatory Committee to the United Nations International Symposium on Trade Efficiency

(Agenda item 8)

43. At its closing plenary meeting, on 1 July 1994, the Preparatory Committee adopted its draft report (TD/SYMP.TE/PC/L.1) and authorized the Rapporteur to complete the text to reflect the proceedings of the closing plenary.

Annex I

DECISION ADOPTED BY THE PREPARATORY COMMITTEE ON PREPARATIONS FOR THE UNITED NATIONS INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON TRADE EFFICIENCY

The Preparatory Committee,

Having considered the texts recommended to it by the Ad Hoc Working Group on Trade Efficiency in its final report (TD/B/40(2)/L.6),

1. Approves the draft Columbus Ministerial Declaration on Trade Efficiency and the draft Recommendations and Guidelines on Trade Efficiency; 1/

2. Decides to remit these texts to the Senior Officials segment of the United Nations International Symposium on Trade Efficiency, for transmittal to the Ministers;

3. Decides to recommend to the Trade and Development Board that, within the framework of the first part of its forty-first session, the Board make provision for half a day to be devoted to an information session on the Symposium;

4. Decides that the Bureau of the Preparatory Committee should continue to be actively engaged in preparations for the Symposium.

1/ Subsequently issued in documents TD/SYMP.TE/R.1 and R.2 respectively.

Annex II

ATTENDANCE 1/

1. The following States members of UNCTAD were represented at the meeting:

Algeria
Angola
Argentina
Australia
Austria
Bangladesh
Bolivia
Brazil
Bulgaria
Chile
China
Colombia
Cuba
Czech Republic
Denmark
Ecuador
Egypt
Finland
France
Germany
Greece
Hungary
India
Indonesia
Iraq
Italy
Jamaica
Japan
Kenya
Libyan Arab Jamahiriya
Malaysia
Malta
Morocco
Namibia
Nepal
Netherlands
Nigeria
Norway
Pakistan
Philippines
Portugal
Republic of Korea
Russian Federation
Saudi Arabia
South Africa
Sri Lanka
Sudan
Sweden
Switzerland
Thailand
Trinidad and Tobago
Tunisia
Turkey
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
United Republic of Tanzania
United States of America
Uruguay
Venezuela
Zambia
Zimbabwe

2. The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific was represented at the meeting. The International Trade Centre UNCTAD/GATT was also represented at the session.

3. The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade was represented at the meeting.

1/ For the list of participants, see TD/SYMP.TE/PC/INF.1.

4. The following intergovernmental organizations were represented at the meeting:

European Community
Organization of African Unity.

5. The following non-governmental organizations were represented at the meeting:

General Category

International Chamber of Commerce
World Federation of United Nations Associations.